

SHORT NOTES

OBSERVATIONS AT A BLACK-FRONTED DOTTEREL NEST

The following observations were made at the Black-fronted Dotterel (*Charadrius melanops*) nest on the Tauherenikau River, southern Wairarapa, found by Barrie Heather on 18 November 1972 with one egg, and seen again on 19 November by BH and Dean Palmer with two eggs.

Incubation period:

Assuming the first day of incubation to have been 21 November, the incubation period seems to have been 25 days because, whereas on the morning of 15 December 1972 BH found there to be still three unchipped eggs, on 16 December at 12.15 p.m. there were three chicks in the nest scrape. If incubation had begun on 20 November, then, of course, the period would be 26 days. The chicks appeared somewhat shaky on their legs and it would seem they had hatched either during the night or early in the morning. There was no sign of egg shells.

Behaviour at the nest:

(a) The only interesting behaviour noted while incubation was progressing was one brief refusal to vacate the eggs by one of the pair as the other approached. The refusal took the form of standing half crouched over the eggs, head lowered, and 'churring' at the mate; but after a few seconds the sitting bird left. The refusal posture was photographed.

(b) After the chicks had hatched there was no apparent effort made to lead them away during my hour and a half's watching during the heat of the day on 16 December. Instead both birds changed over on the nest at almost exactly ten-minute intervals. They would spend ten minutes half crouched and with wings spread over the chicks while they jockeyed for position underneath. As soon as the other adult arrived the crouching bird would make for the stream nearby and spend most of the time standing quite deep in the water, sufficiently so for the lower breast and stomach feathers to become quite wet. It was noticeable that some of the small stones at the nest were wet and possibly this behaviour was a means of keeping the chicks cool on this particularly hot day.

(c) A 'broken wing' display was seen on 16 December. The first stage involved spreading the tail (which was towards me), tilting the body slightly and partially spreading one wing. The second stage involved the alternate flapping of both wings (i.e. one wing would be flapped about three or four times and then the other — I did not see both being flapped at once), plus the spread tail and a flattening of the bird on the stones.

DON HADDEN

22 Bevington Street,
Avonhead,
Christchurch 4